

## DETECTIVES TOO HONEST NOW

DON'T RIDE ON CAR PLATFORMS TO POCKET STOLEN WALLETS.

Remarks of J. McGraw, ex-convict, on the days of being in New York and the time when he was in the penitentiary.

James McGraw, once known in the circles as the Count, old time bank snatcher and hotel robber, turned up in New York the other day after an absence of many years. He is now 51 years old and has recently finished a fifteen years sentence in the State prison at Mendocino, W. Va., for robbing a bank in Charleston of \$4,000 in 1892. McGraw came to the Sun office yesterday and announced that he intended hereafter to lead an honest life.

"I am through with the thieving business," he said. "All I want is a chance to make an honest living. I know that it is hard for an ex-convict to get a chance, for just as soon as your record is known everybody is afraid of you. But I am going to try just the same."

"Any way the old business is not what it used to be in New York. The detectives here have got to be so honest that they are no longer interesting. I can well remember when Headquarters men stood on the back platforms of Grand street cars and had the pocketbooks passed to them that were stolen by crooks. In the division they always got their share of the swag. But there isn't anything doing now and if there was it would be for me, and I want no more of it. If I can only get some kind of a job where I can make enough to keep me I will be glad."

McGraw talks well. He went to school but a short time when a boy, but he picked up a pretty good education through extensive reading.

"I was born in Harlem," he said, "and used to sell papers as a boy. The first crooked job I ever did was to steal a pocketbook from the Astor Hotel. I was only a lad then and the job must have been pretty well done, for it attracted the attention of Luke Miner, the greatest stall and promoter of thieving in America. He got to me and told me I was a clever boy and that I could make plenty of money without any hard work if I would follow his advice. He said he was going West, where the getting was good and he asked me to go along."

"We stopped off at Syracuse and there I made my first bank with us. There was a Democratic convention going on there and a number of detectives from Mulberry street, including Heidelberg, were along with the New York crowd. I succeeded in sneaking a bunch of bonds out of the open safe in broad daylight. Why they had seen the detectives from New York and they had seen him, so we decided that we would be in for it when the robbery was discovered. We knew that they would pounce down on us the first crack our bond of the box, so it was decided that the bonds should be replaced. I did that job, too. The bonds were put back in the safe and the bank never knew it had been robbed. If it had been cash we would have skipped with the plunder, taking our chances. But we feared that even if we did get away with the bonds we would have trouble in negotiating them."

McGraw told this story with a sober face. He said he was only 19 years old then. When asked how it was possible for him to sneak twice to a bank safe in business hours he smiled and said:

"Bank fixtures were not then what they are to-day. They were much more simple in their construction, and it was comparatively easy matter to get at the safe—that is, if you were an expert. Now you couldn't get behind the counter in a bank with a galling gun."

McGraw says he went West with Miner and pulled off many successful sneaks in Chicago, Denver and other large cities. They got \$12,000 worth of swag in one jewelry store in Denver. For nine years he stuck to Miner. Joe Dubuge, another noted stall, was in the gang. He was arrested several times, but always managed to get off. In that period, McGraw estimates, the gang got away with \$100,000. It was all spent on gambling, horseracing and high living.

McGraw says that he was arrested in Louisville in 1878 for a sneak robbery at the office of the Louisville and Nashville. He was caught coming out, with the goods on him, and he got a year in the Frankfort prison. When he got out he came here again and was pinched for snatching a wallet in Wall street. Under the name of Livingston he got two years in Sing Sing.

"When I was released," the ex-convict continued, "I went to Chicago, and with Billy Burke and Ed Merrill worked under the protection of the police. The rakeoff for the sleuths was 20 per cent. Our principal stamping ground was the hotels. Each of us would pick out a hotel and register there. Early in the morning we would sneak into any rooms we found unlocked. It is remarkable how many people leave their doors unlocked at night in first class hotels on the assumption that they are as safe there as at home. We never took anything but money and jewels. We always passed up watches. That was because there is likely to be some sentimental attachment to watches that spur the owners on to get them back. All the little stones we stole were sent to a certain place in New York, who is still alive. For two years we always whacked up with the police of Chicago."

McGraw said that in the Blaine campaign of 1884 he made a trip South, stopping here and there for an odd job, and he got considerable money robbing merchants, railroad offices and the like. He was caught robbing a bank in Nashville and was sentenced to ten years, but through a certain influence which he would not name, the sentence was commuted to one year. When he got out he went to England and met Miner and Dave Cummings, another noted bank snatcher and hotel robber.

"We worked the American colony in London and the hotels in the provincial cities," continued the ex-convict. "The London hotels were impossible and at first we let them alone. They were too well guarded for our business. Finally, however, Cummings insisted on trying some of them. I refused to do so, but he insisted on going down there. By that time I had got a horror of prison life and did not want any more of it if I could possibly avoid it. So Cummings and I went to the registered in the Charing Cross Hotel and when he went away he took the key with him. The key was missed and when Cummings showed up again he had a bunch of skeleton keys made he was arrested and got five years."

"We used to go over to Paris for the first and fifteen days of every month, for there were better days for depositing in the banks. The men there didn't seem to be as suspicious as they are here and in England. We would get into the line at the desk where the prospective depositors were counting their money. One of the stalls would put a question to some man who looked easy and generally he would turn around without taking up his pile. This was the chance for the sneak. He would never take it all, for that would be too dangerous. The trick was to 'weed' the pile—that is to take part of it."

"When McGraw came back here in 1888 he went, he says to Chicago and organized a 'gang' with John Lacey, better known as 'Molly Matchew,' a skilful pickpocket; Henry Curtis, known as the father of the hotel sneak business, who robbed twenty-seven rooms in the Fifth Avenue Hotel in

one day and Red Wolf, a confidence man and an excellent thief. They made preparations for a far western trip and McGraw agreed to make enough on the way by picking pockets to pay the travelling expenses provided he was let in on a division of the swag when his hands were made."

"I had a pretty good time," said McGraw. "We stayed West about a year, and we did a great business. Our profits must have amounted to \$50,000, but I blew it all as fast as we got it. I know that in one haul in Lincoln, Neb., I got \$2,500."

"Then we went to Canada and did a few jobs, then Jimmie Carroll had joined us in Chicago when we came back. He was one of the cleverest among the stalls. In Montreal Curtis found out that the gang was expected to receive a payment on a large number of bills on a certain day. The safe was at the left of the cashier. It was in full view of the people in line to pay their bills, but the cashier could not see it without turning around. Curtis figured that if I would walk in, open the wooden gate leading to the space where the safe was and take the money out of it those in the line would pay no attention to me, but would think that I was an employee of the company."

"And that was the way the job was pulled off. I was bareheaded, wore a black jacket and carried a pen behind my ear. I took \$2,500 from that safe and got away with it without the slightest trouble. But Carroll and Curtis, in their room in a hotel, got to fighting over the matter. Carroll said that we should have waited until the following day, when the hotel would have been much larger. They talked in loud tones and were overheard. They were arrested and got five years each. I skipped to Chicago and from there I sent their lawyers their share of the swag."

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"We worked all that season under police protection," continued McGraw, "and the graft was certainly good. Every morning we got \$10 in a certain algon and that went to certain detectives. We never had any direct communication with them, but we were never molested. After the fair was closed down, I made a trip South and got pinched for that job at Charleston."

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